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January 13, 2025

Members of the North Dakota Senate Education and Environment Division Appropriations Committee

RE: Support for SB 2019 – Career and Technical Education Appropriations

Dear Chairman Sorvaag and Members of the Senate Education & Environment Division Appropriations Committee,

I write to you today in strong support of SB 2019, a bill critical to sustaining and expanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) in North Dakota. CTE equips students with the hands-on learning experiences, industry-aligned skills, and leadership opportunities necessary to meet the demands of our state's workforce. The priorities within SB 2019 represent a strategic investment in North Dakota's future, addressing workforce shortages and preparing our youth to thrive in high-demand, high-wage careers. Below I've highlighted key features within the CTE appropriations request that directly impact our center programming that serves students in 56 different high schools statewide.

Cost to Continue

The Department of Career and Technical Education is requesting \$4 million to maintain reimbursement rates for existing high school CTE programs. These funds are crucial to ensure the sustainability of high-quality programs that have been built to provide students with positive local and regional career and technical educational opportunities in order to better provide them with experiences for future careers and workforce. Our CTE program alone is helping to serve over 800 students, at 56 different high schools throughout North Dakota, resulting in over 1,200 CTE course enrollments throughout the 2024-2025 school year. Without this funding, existing programs may face challenges in continuing to deliver high-quality career and technical education to our students.

New Programs

With a request of \$22 million, SB 2019 supports the introduction and expansion of CTE programs across the state. These funds will enable the development of new programs at high schools and Area Career and Technology Centers such as CRACTC. Notably, this includes the expansion of highly leveraged online/hybrid programming into such areas as Agriculture Business and Technology, Aviation Mechanics, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, and more. By focusing on areas aligned with high-demand occupations identified by the North Dakota Workforce Development Council, these initiatives will equip students with the skills needed to thrive in the modern workforce while also addressing the unique challenges faced by rural communities.

CTE Capital Projects Program

The one-time funding request of \$56 million for the CTE Capital Projects Program addresses significant gaps in access to Area Career and Technology Centers. While 13 projects were funded in the 2021-23 biennium, many regions remain underserved. This funding will expand the reach of existing centers, including rural regional satellite sites. These sites are particularly critical for providing hands-on training opportunities in rural areas, where the costs of hiring specialized teachers often exceed local budgets or simply are just not available. By sharing resources, utilizing creative delivery methods among multiple districts, and offering programs tailored to the specific needs of local, regional, and/or statewide industries, these satellite sites will ensure that every student, regardless of location, has access to high-quality education and training. Additionally, this approach fosters partnerships with local businesses, creating a direct pipeline from education to employment and helping to attract economic investment in rural communities.

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Work-Based Learning

Work-based learning is a cornerstone of effective CTE programming. The \$1.5 million request for Work-Based Learning Coordinators will enhance and expand partnerships between education and industry, providing high school students with invaluable real-world experience. These coordinators have just begun to implement initiatives and strategies to connect students to opportunities that align education with career pathways. Expanding work-based learning ensures that our students graduate with the skills, credentials, and confidence that industry is craving and needs to succeed in North Dakota, National, and/or the international workforce.

Additional Considerations

Investing in CTE programs, including satellite sites, offers substantial economic and social benefits for North Dakota. As previously mentioned, satellite sites bring educational opportunities closer to rural and underserved areas, fostering local job creation and economic revitalization. These initiatives not only align with statewide economic goals but also leverage existing resources to maximize reach and cost-effectiveness. Moreover, the development and expansion of satellite sites may attract businesses to rural areas, or allow the continuation of businesses in rural communities, by ensuring a readily available skilled workforce. This strategy ensures that North Dakota remains competitive in a rapidly changing economy.

Economically, these investments stimulate local economies, prepare a skilled workforce, and maximize the state's return on investment. Socially and emotionally, they demonstrate pride in local communities and leave a lasting legacy of growth and stability.

SB 2019 represents a forward-thinking approach to workforce development, addressing critical needs in education, industry, and community. The funding priorities outlined—from maintaining existing programs to establishing new opportunities—are essential to preparing North Dakota's students to meet the challenges of tomorrow. I urge you to support SB 2019 and these vital investments in Career and Technical Education. Together, we can ensure that North Dakota remains a leader in workforce readiness and economic growth. Thank you for your dedication and service to our state.

Please feel free to contact me at your convenience if you have any questions you'd like to discuss.

Sincerely,

Lyle P Krueger

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